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IROQUOIAN CLANS AND PHRATRIES

By C. M. BARBEAU

THE Iroquoian race, formerly occupying most of the territory extending from the Great Lakes to the present states of Carolina, consisted of the Cherokee, the Tuscarora, the Five Nations or Iroquois proper, the Huron-Wyandot, the Neutral, and the Erie, with a total population aggregating from eighty thousand to one hundred thousand at the time of the discovery. Each one of these peoples was made up of many smaller nations, divided into tribes, and the tribes into towns and villages with an average population of less than two thousand souls. While political independence was, as a whole, the essential attribute of the village or town, there existed a marked tendency towards wider centralization which, in some cases, resulted in the federation of towns, tribes, and even nations.

Of far greater importance was the Iroquoian kinship organization, the ramifications of which extended far beyond the national frontiers. The only fundamental kinship unit, universal among the Iroquoian and neighboring peoples, is the totemic clan. Other relationship organizations, such as the phratry and the family, were either sporadic or subsidiary. The family, for one, was an ill-defined and amorphous group of close relatives tracing their descent to the same *remembered* and immediate maternal ancestor. There was no marked distinction between different families within the clan, which were supposedly issued from a common remote maternal ancestor. The clan was to the families what the tree is to the limbs. The more interesting relation between the phratry and the clan is the main object of the present study.

The Iroquoian and neighboring Algonkian¹ clans, on the whole, were widely diffused exogamic kinship units, endowed with in-

¹ Under the name "Algonkian" are included the nations speaking an Algonkian dialect.

conspicuous crest and supernatural guardian systems, the membership of which was inherited in the maternal line or conferred through adoption. As will be seen in the following lists, the clans were few in number; but their component parts were found disseminated in sections of numerous towns of many tribes and nations. Distance and linguistic barriers did not prevent the members of the same clan from acknowledging their relationship and mutually abiding by the rules of exogamy and fraternal help.

Of the Cherokee clans little is known besides the fact that they once numbered fourteen, and are now supposed to be "seven clans"—a reference to a mystic number. "The Wolf clan was the largest and most important" (J. Mooney); the Deer, Bird, and Paint clans are the only other ones the English names of which are given.

The number of the Tuscarora clans is not definitely known. Hewitt gives four slightly different lists, in which the order varies, presumably because they referred to different parts of the nation. The clans are: (1) the Bear, which appears the first in every list; (2) the Wolf, divided in one place into Gray Wolf and Yellow Wolf, which is given as second, fifth, and seventh in different lists; (3) the Turtle, twice given as subdivided into Small Turtle and Large Turtle, appearing in the third and fourth place; (4) the Deer clan, to which the third rank is granted in two lists, and the fifth and sixth rank in the two others; (5) the Eel clan, appearing in the second place in three lists, and sixth in the other; (6) the Beaver clan, to which the fourth, fifth, or seventh place is granted; and (7) the Snipe clan, given everywhere as the last. Morgan, on the other hand, states that, when the Tuscarora were admitted, about 1712, into the Iroquois League, their eight "gentes" were arranged into two sides or phratries, as follows:—first phratry: (1) Bear, (2) Beaver, (3) Great Turtle, (4) Eel; second phratry: (1) Gray Wolf, (2) Yellow Wolf, (3) Little Turtle, (4) Snipe. The Deer, he adds, became extinct in modern times.

There was no uniformity in the arrangement of the clans among the Iroquois proper or Five Nations. The Mohawk and the Oneida, the easternmost nations, seem to have had only three

independent clans each, which are given in the following order: (Morgan) the Bear, the Wolf, and the Turtle; (Goldenweiser) the Turtle, the Wolf, and the Bear. On one modern Iroquois reserve, Goldenweiser has found these clans subdivided into three component parts of the same nature. The clans of the Onondaga nation belonged to two phratries. The first phratry consisted of the Wolf, Turtle, Snipe, Beaver, and Ball clans; the second, of the Deer, the Eel, and the Bear (Morgan). The first of the Cayuga phratries claimed the Bear, Wolf, Turtle, Snipe, and Eel clans; the second, the Deer, Beaver, and Hawk clans (Morgan). The Seneca nation, the westernmost one, consisted of the Bear, Wolf, Beaver, and Turtle clans, in the first phratry; and the Deer, Snipe, Heron, and Hawk, in the second (Morgan); or, according to Goldenweiser, of the Turtle, Bear, Wolf, and Ball, in the first phratry; and the Hawk, Deer, Snipe, Duck, and Eel, in the second. The Deer, however, is not found in the modern list.

In a manuscript dated 1666,¹ it is stated that the Iroquoian nation was divided into two bands, respectively of four and five families. The first band was named Gueyniotiteshesgué, which is said to mean four families; and the second, Ouichinotiteshesgué, *i. e.*, five families. These families (clans) are given as follows: in the first band, 1. the Turtle, 2. the Wolf, 3. the Bear, 4. the Beaver; in the second, 1. the Deer, 2. the *Grand Pluvier* (large plover), 3. the Wild Potatoe, 4. the *Petit Pluvier* (small plover), and 5. the *Kilion* (a bird, possibly the Hawk).

The Wyandot clans seem, at least theoretically, once to have been grouped into two phratries and a third odd unit, the Wolf clan. One phratry consisted of the Big Turtle, Mud (small) Turtle, Prairie Turtle, and Hawk clans; and the other, of the Deer, Bear, Porcupine, and Beaver clans. The Snake and the Snipe clans, moreover, have, in modern times, been added to that list. Informants state that the Snake clan originated out of the Deer clan, with which it is still related. As to the Snipe clan, it was recently introduced from the Cayuga-Seneca system into that of the western

¹ Dominion Archives of Canada, Ottawa, in the *Correspondance Générale*, F 2 (1663-1667), p. 2.

Wyandot. The Lorette Huron claim to have belonged to four clans, the Turtle, the Bear, the Deer, and the Wolf. There is no need of giving here earlier lists, such as those of Finley, Clarke, Walker, Morgan, Powell, and Connelley, which, on the whole, agree with that of the author given above. Some confusion, due to the lack of a careful study, is to be noticed in the case of the many Turtle clans, which, according to Connelley, would be as many as five. The so-called Eagle clan, in Finley, is evidently a misnomer for the Hawk clan. Nothing is known of the clans of the extinct Erie and Neutral nations.

In the various Algonkian, Siouan, Muskogean, Yuchi, Pueblo, and other lists of clans we find, unevenly represented, most of the Iroquoian clans, besides many others.¹ The diffusion of the same clans here is in all probability due to direct transmission or to imitation.

The Wolf clan seems the most important and widely distributed among the Algonkian, the Iroquoian, the Siouan, and other eastern, southern, and central nations. It is found among the Cherokee, Tuscarora (Gray and Yellow Wolf), Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Wyandot, Huron, Mohican, Abenaki, Ojibwa, Potawatomi, Miami, Menomini, Shawnee, Sauk and Fox, Kickapoo, Oto, Missouri, Winnebago, Mandan, Chickasaw, Creek, Yuchi, Hopi, Taos, and presumably many others.

The Bear clan is found among the Tuscarora, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Wyandot, Huron, Mohican, Abenaki, Ojibwa, Potawatomi, Miami, Menomini, Shawnee, Sauk and Fox, Kickapoo, Iowa, Oto, Missouri, Winnebago, Quapaw, Ponca, Kansa, Omaha, Pawnee (?), Creek, Yuchi, Acoma, Hopi, Zuñi, Sia, Taos, Walpi, Nambe, and Pecos.

While the Deer clan is not found among the easternmost Algonkian, it obtains among the Cherokee, Tuscarora, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Wyandot, Huron, Shawnee, Menomini, Winnebago, Quapaw, Kansa, Omaha, Pawnee (?), Chickasaw, Creek, Yuchi, Hopi, Zuñi, Sia, and Pecos.

The Turtle clan, on the other hand, has a more easterly distribu-

¹ Morgan, *Ancient Society*.

tion than the Deer, namely among the Tuscarora (Small and Large Turtles), Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Wyandot (Big, Mud, and Prairie Turtles), Huron, Delaware, Munsee, Mohican (Little, Mud, and Great Turtles), Ojibwa (Mud, Little, and Snapping Turtles), Menomini (Mud Turtle), Shawnee, Quapaw, Omaha, and Yuchi.

The distribution of the following clans is limited to fewer nations. The Beaver clan is found among the Tuscarora, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Wyandot, Huron, Ojibwa, Abenaki, Potawatomi, Menomini, Oto, Iowa, Pawnee (?), Yuchi, Creek, and Quapaw nations. The snipe clan is found among the Tuscarora, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Wyandot (recently introduced), Ojibwa, Sauk, and probably many others. The Eel clan has its constituent members among the Tuscarora, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca (according to Goldenweiser), and Mohican (Yellow Eel). The Hawk clan is found among the Cayuga, Seneca, Wyandot, Abenaki (Pigeon Hawk), Ojibwa (Pigeon Hawk), Potawatomi (Black Hawk), Menomini, Sauk and Fox, Hopi, and Sia. The Snake clan, recently introduced among the Wyandot, belongs to the Abenaki, Ojibwa (Snake and Water Snake), Shawnee, Iowa, Oto, Missouri, Winnebago, Quapaw, Ponca, Yuchi, Walpi, Pecos, Hopi, and Zuñi. The Porcupine clan is found among the Abenaki, Wyandot, Menomini, and Hopi. The Duck clan belongs to the Seneca (according to Goldenweiser), Ojibwa, Menomini, Hopi, and possibly some other central tribes. The Ball clan seems to belong exclusively to the Onondaga and (according to Goldenweiser) the Seneca. The Heron clan is found among the Seneca, possibly the Mohican, the Ojibwa, Menomini, and some Pueblo tribes. The Wild Potatoe clan, which a 1666 manuscript¹ gives as Iroquois, belongs also to the Sauk, Yuchi, and Creek.

The clans, among some Iroquoian and other nations, were federated into larger exogamous bodies, now termed phratries, the main function of which seems to have been political. The distribution of the phratries by itself indicates that they must have spread gradually and in comparatively recent times among the

¹ Morgan, *ibid.*

few Iroquoian and Algonkian nations who possess them, and that their growth is historically disconnected from that of the clans. Out of eight Iroquoian nations only four surely had a phratric system. These are the Tuscarora, the Onondaga, the Cayuga, and the Seneca. The Mohawk and Oneida clans may possibly have been subdivided into smaller clans, standing in the relation of clans to phratry; but this point has still to be proved. Among the Wyandot, moreover, it seems that once an attempt at least was made to arrange the clans into phratries.

Phratries were also found among some of the neighboring Algonkian nations, such as the Delaware, who had three phratries, as follows: I. Wolf, Bear, Dog, and Opossum; II. Little Turtle, Mud Turtle, Great Turtle, and Yellow Eel; III. Turkey, Crane, and Chicken clans.

The occurrence of the phratries and moieties, although sporadic, is fairly common in the North American tribes and among people whom the Iroquoian tribes are likely once to have come into direct or indirect contact with, such as the Yuchi, the Siouan tribes, the Muskogean tribes, and the Pueblo and Mexican Indians. It is therefore safe to consider this institution as a derived rather than an original and exclusive one.

Since our subject-matter has a direct bearing on the often discussed history of the phratries and clans, we will now consider some characteristic features in the nature and growth of those of the Iroquoian tribes and their neighbors. L. H. Morgan, in 1877, explained the growth of phratries in the following words:¹

It proves conclusively the natural process by which, in course of time, a gens [clan] breaks up into several, and these remain united in a phratric organization, which is expressed by assuming a phratric name. . . . It shows . . . that the phratry is founded upon the kinship of the gentes.

This generally accepted hypothesis on the origin of the American phratries was also applied by A. Lang to some Australian phratries; and Goldenweiser has lately adhered to the same view, expressing his belief in the priority in time of the phratry over the clans

¹ L. H. Morgan, *Ancient Society*, 1907 ed., p. 100.

among the Iroquoian tribes. This point has since been debated. It seems, however, that this hypothesis is untenable, as the clans, and not the phratries, are universal, ancient, and essential among the Iroquoian and neighboring nations.

Our reason for considering the phratric and clan systems, in the Eastern Woodlands, as unrelated to each other in their development may be outlined under the following headings: I, The geographic distribution of the clans and the phratries in North America does not coincide; II, while clans are universal among the Iroquoian tribes and most of their neighbors, phratries appear only sporadically in a minority of Iroquoian nations, and seldom in their immediate vicinity; III, the lack of uniformity in the arrangement of clans in the phratries reveals an arbitrary purpose rather than unconscious growth and transmission; IV, while the clans have never ceased to the present time to be at the basis of the social system, the phratries have disappeared together with the Iroquoian confederacy; V, the totemic attributes of the clans were never shared by the phratries, with the exception of the accidental exogamic rule, which proved to be more persistently a clan than a phratric feature.

I. Eponymous clans seem to be the most typical and widely distributed form of kinship organization in North America. Phratries, on the other hand, cover a much smaller expanse, and their essential traits are not necessarily grafted upon clans or confined to their area of diffusion; but, among many western tribes, they appear in the form of tribal, exogamic, or ceremonial moieties.¹ There is little doubt that, in the course of time, the moiety or phratric system as well as specific eponymous clans spread independently in various directions, from as many unique, but not necessarily identical, centers. While the clans may claim a considerable antiquity in the eastern half of North America, the phratries and moieties are distinctly at home in the southeast, center, southwest, and Mexico, wherefrom the Iroquoian ones must have been derived. It is, moreover, remarkable that wherever

¹ The term moiety is here used to refer to an aggregation of non-totemic social units, whether such aggregations are two or more in number.

the phratric system is wanting as a whole the clans show no tendency towards growing into phratries, in the manner above described.

II. Practically none of the Iroquoian clans is exclusively its own. Wolf, Bear, Deer, and Turtle clans are not only found in every Iroquoian nation, but in a great many tribes from the Atlantic coast to Arizona. The identical three Turtle clans, on the other hand, obtain only among the Ojibwa, Wyandot and Delaware; and two are claimed by the Tuscarora. The obvious centers of diffusion of the Hawk, Snake, Porcupine, Duck and other minor clans lie outside of the Iroquoian frontiers, wherein they were introduced only at one or two places. It is still remembered among the Wyandot, for instance, how and about when the Snake and Snipe clans came into existence; the Snipe clan having branched off from that of the Seneca, and the Snake clan having appeared when they were living in close contact with the Ojibwa, who had a Snake clan.

While to be an Iroquoian Indian it was essential to belong to a clan, it may be said that the phratric system affected only a minority of their population, belonging possibly to less than one half of their nations—that is the Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora. The Cherokee and Huron had no phratries, as far as we know. The three Mohawk and Oneida clans have been considered merely as such. And the actual or prolonged existence of Wyandot phratries is problematical. The Delaware phratries were a strikingly exceptional development among the Algonkians, and were evidently due to Iroquoian influence.

III. Had the most ancient clans of the Iroquoian tribes grown into phratries by gradually splitting up into related constituent clans still retaining their genetic connection, we should now find evidence of this ancient process. The reverse is true, however, as we have seen above.

The arrangement of the clans within the phratries, moreover, does not show any genetic development, as they are found now in one, now in an opposite phratry. The Wolf clan was the head of a phratry among the Onondaga, Tuscarora, and Delaware. It was a subdivision of the phratry headed by the Bear among the Cayuga

and Seneca. In the above-mentioned manuscript list it is given as a subdivision of the group headed by the Turtle. And among the Wyandot and other nations it stood alone. The Bear clan was at the head of a phratry among the Tuscarora, Cayuga, and Seneca; but it came last in the Onondaga phratry under the leadership of the Deer, and second in the Wyandot phratry under the Deer clan and in the Seneca and Iroquois lists of Goldenweiser and the above-mentioned manuscript. It stood independently elsewhere. While the Turtle (or Big Turtle, when there is more than one) was the leader of a Delaware and an hypothetical Wyandot phratry and is also given that rank in the old Iroquois manuscript referred to, it is given after the Wolf and the Bear clans, in the same phratry, among the Tuscarora, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. The Deer clan, which is almost uniformly given as the head of a phratry among the Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Wyandot, does not seem to exist in the Mohawk, Oneida, and Tuscarora nations. Although the Hawk clan, when it is found, is of minor rank, it is given by Goldenweiser as the head of a Seneca phratry; and the Deer clan comes only after. The same thorough lack of consistent arrangement—if we consider phratric relationship—is found in the case of every clan, of whatever importance. Notwithstanding the probable fact that the three Turtle clans were derived from one another, two of their subdivisions are found in opposite phratries among the Tuscarora. The Bear and Deer clans, in three nations, are found in the same or corresponding phratry, and in three others in the opposite one. The Wolf clan is either associated with the Turtle clan or is independent. In the two neighboring Seneca and Cayuga nations the Beaver clan is found respectively in the phratry led by the Deer clan and in the opposite phratry. And so on.

If such a state of affairs could never be explained satisfactorily in the light of the contested hypothesis, it becomes logical enough if we assume that the guiding principle in the arrangement of clans into phratries was the deliberate consideration of the balance of power, or the approximately even division of numbers between the two or three phratries, in the national councils or in the ceremonial functions. In other words, it can only be understood through the

assumption that a conscious political federation of clans once took place in several Iroquoian nations, together or severally; such a move being probably fostered by the imitation of a similar foreign example and by the desire of improving the national efficiency through a greater unity in its councils and wars.

IV. Although the few Iroquoian phratries probably existed before the creation of the League or Confederacy (about a century before the discovery), the clearness of their outlines must partly be due to their functional importance in the operation of the Confederacy, which they have followed in its downfall, thus allowing the clans once more to become exclusively supreme, as in their original condition. The only vestiges of the former existence of the phratries in the four Iroquoian nations that once possessed them are to be found in the memory of informants, in myths, and in the more palpable forms of many surviving rituals and ceremonies. The "brother and sister" relationship and connected exogamy once embracing all the clans in the same phratry have long been discarded or forgotten; and, in the course of a statistical investigation on this point, Goldenweiser could only notice a weak tendency among the older people towards avoiding intermarriage between the clans formerly of the same phratry. The only informant possessing the Wyandot tradition about the phratries strongly denied that exogamy ever applied to the phratries, although his recited text plainly implied it. The same text, moreover, describes the creation of the Wyandot phratries as having taken place in a great national council at which several foreign tribes attended.

It should also be remembered that, with the exception of the exogamic taboo, the phratries were operative factors only in the case of a reunion of a national council or of important ceremonials. The respective centers of the various clans were usually scattered far apart, in different towns; and these had to be convoked and represented in order to fulfil their most essential duty. In the absence of councils or ceremonials, the phratries were only latent, and a continued inactivity meant their disappearance. This in itself indicates the nature of their elaborate political origin or federation of naturally dispersed elements.

v. The Iroquoian clans are typically totemic; but this cannot be said of the phratries. While the heraldic and supernatural aspects of Iroquoian totemism were moderately developed in the clans, the phratries did not share these traits in the slightest degree. The clans were eponymous, or named after a certain animal designated in a metaphorical term; but the phratries were nameless, although ethnographers have a tendency, for the sake of convenience, to name them after their head clan. In the 1666 manuscript, as we have seen, the first phratry was termed "the-four-families," and the second "the-five-families," from the fact that there were four clans in one and five in the other. Each clan owned exclusively a list of individual names, a varying proportion of which referred to the clan animal; such a proportion being large among the Wyandot, and trifling—we are told—among the Iroquois proper. Although the clan animal was considered as a supernatural protector of his human confederates, the evidence here is rather scarce, and points to the fact that this totemic trait may originally have been still less marked than the ancient Iroquoian custom of representing pictorially the clan totem on various objects belonging to the clan or its members.¹ As there were no phratric, but only clan, animals, the phratries as such were devoid of all the totemic features which had not been extended to them by the clans. And exogamy, which—we assume—at first was a clan taboo, resumed its earlier form as soon as the phratries dropped out of existence. When citizenship was conferred upon a native child or a stranger it was only through his adoption into a clan; the phratry was not vitally concerned in this process.

GEOLOGICAL SURVEY,
OTTAWA, CANADA

¹ The above-mentioned manuscript states that each family had the picture of its "family" animal painted in the gable of its house, some in black and others in red (p. 395).